SPE 545: Assistive Technology Deirdre Clark-Garcia

Doctor Xiuwen Wu Loretta Grennon

March 11, 2008

**Lesson Plan Critique**

We evaluated a lesson plan for fifth and sixth graders on the use of literary devices to create meaning in literature. The lesson involved dividing the class into small groups and presenting each group with three different literary devices and a piece of candy. The groups had to decide how to use the three literary devices in combination to create a commercial advertising the candy. The groups would then perform the commercial for the whole class. For example, in an actual lesson that one of us observed, a group received a Hershey’s Kiss, and the literary devices of personification, science fiction and mood. This group devised a commercial in which a Hershey’s Kiss with a voice (personification) from outer space (science fiction) cooed romantically (mood, “I feel so chocolaty and creamy.”

We considered this lesson plan as it might relate to the following characteristics and special needs of four students: 1) a student who is non-verbal; 2) a student or group of students who do not want to perform in front of the class; 3) a student with cerebral palsy who becomes tired after standing too long and who has difficulties with fine motor coordination; and 4) a student who has mild to moderate developmental disabilities.

On our UDL Analysis Form, we set forth the potential barriers and missed opportunities that we envisioned in the lesson plan for the students mentioned above. Initially, though, we noted that the lesson starts out as being a good one to accommodate the needs and abilities of a diverse group of fifth and sixth grade students. It is a thought provoking, interesting and involving way to get the students thinking about literary devices – how to use a variety of such devices to advertise a kind of candy with which most students are familiar and, hopefully, most enjoy. Even this generally good lesson plan can be made better by focusing attention on the principles of UDL.

Knowing that we have a student who is non-verbal, we must make sure that any materials he needs for communication are available in the classroom, are accessible to him and are working properly. Whether these are low-tech devices or high-tech devices, we must ensure that they provide him with the ability to participate with his peers in tackling the assignment. Knowing that we have students who are self-conscious about the final work product, the performance of the commercial, we can modify the end result, and have students create a video commercial, using graphics software from the school’s computer or using some technological device belonging to the student, such as iMovie. We have therefore revised our lesson plan to include some additional technological materials.

For all of our students, we can recognize and acknowledge the input of all kinds of effort and involvement, rather than focusing on the finished work product of the group. For instance, as related to the students uncomfortable performing, we can encourage those who bring ideas to the group and develop them into the commercial, maybe coaching the other students in the performance, but who choose to watch rather than participate in it. As for the student with CP as we described, she may want to share her contributions from a seated position, and she may trade hand written or typed communication for oral communication. The accommodations already noted will also be of assistance to the student with developmental disabilities. Depending on his interests and abilities, he may want to participate in a performance of the commercial, may enjoy creating a video presentation or may contribute via technological means or spoken communication.

What we learned about UDL is that by taking into consideration all of our students’ needs, abilities and learning styles, we can include a diverse array of students into our classrooms and into our lesson plans. What we learned about technology integration is that by providing these enhancements to our learning environment, we may allow some students to participate who otherwise could not (such as our non-verbal student) and may encourage greater, and more meaningful, participation from students who might otherwise be marginalized in a group project (the other three students). What we learned about content teaching is that more authentic learning can take place when content (in this case, literary devices) is presented in ways that allow for students’ differing physical abilities, cognitive abilities, creative ideas, performance skills, emotional responses – in other words, the different characteristics that make us all individuals, whether children or adults.

As for collaboration, what we learned about the lesson plan relates to what we learned about our work as team members. In this lesson plan, collaboration played a key role in making this assignment work. By having a group of students join together to work on the assignment, their various skills and abilities could be employed in ways that might not have been possible, or as fruitful, if they were told to work alone. One person’s creativity may blend with another person’s love of drama; one student’s mental energy may blend with another student’s physical stamina.

We were asked to collaborate with each other on this assignment, and, again, our joint efforts most likely generated more ideas than if we were each working in isolation. One of the best ways to teach our students is to model the behavior or characteristics we wish for them to emulate. To be genuinely collaborative with each other, especially in an inclusive classroom based on UDL, is to demonstrate to students the value of collaborating with each of the other different individuals in their classroom.